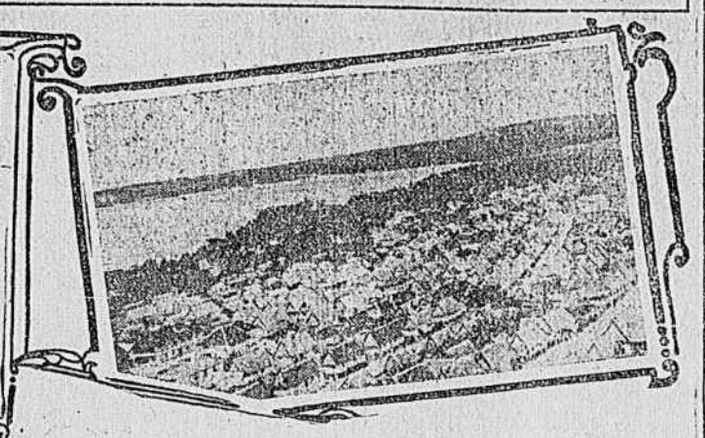
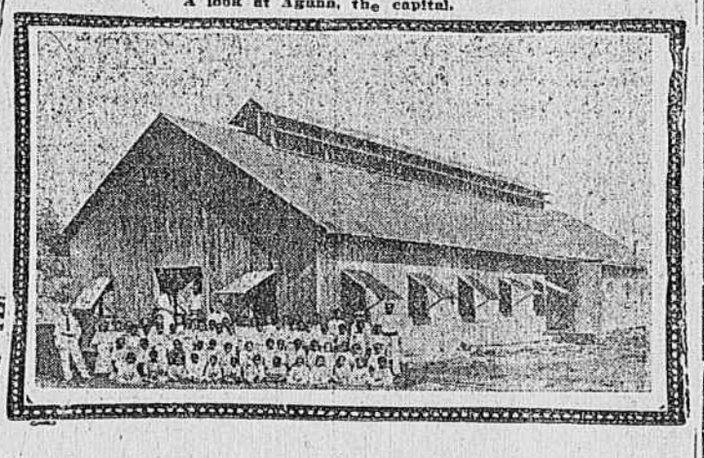
What the Navy Department Has Done on the Island of Guam

A Guamite of the upper crust and his family.



A new hospital for special patients has just been completed.

A look at Agana, the capital.



A country school in Guam.

BY FRANK G. CARPENTER.

Washington, D. C.

THE big hand of Uncle Sam, patriarch, grasps the world. It reaches from the Atlantic, where Porto Rico lies under the thumb, to the far-away western Pacific, where the longest fingers rest on the Philippines and the tip of the little finger nail scratches the Island of Guam.

Our Smallest Possession.

Of all our new colonies Guam is the smallest. It is hardly a patch of court plaster on the face of the Pacific, and its native population is less than 12,000. Nevertheless it lies right on the line from the Panama Canal to the Philippines and East Asia, and it may some day form a coaling station and naval base for us in the wars of the future. We got the island as one of the byproducts of our war with Spain. We have had it for more than twelve years, and it is now time to take account of stock and see what we have done. The island has been under the control of the Secretary of the Navy and a naval officer, backed by a corps of marines, has been its reorganizer, commander and governor. Since we took possession there have been a half-dozen different men on the job, and out of their work has come the Guam of to-day.

What have they done?

They have taken one of the most backward little islands of the Pacific and made it one of the best. They have given it justice and good government, and have made themselves liked by the people. They have cleaned up the country, have built good roads everywhere through it, and have practically eliminated epidemic and contagious diseases. They have started the people to thinking, and have made every man and every woman learn to write his or her name. They have established schools and hospitals. They have wiped out the vagrants, and have given the little country a period of prosperity. All this in a nutshell. Now as to particulars.

The Island of Guam.

But where is Guam? You remember how Judge Riley, of Virginia, when appointed consul to Zanzibar, came back to Washington after six months' absence and said he had been cruising the oceans, but for the life of him he couldn't find the darned place. I knew Judge Riley. He was a bird.

Well, Guam is now almost as well known as Zanzibar. The only way to get to it is by the United States transports which ply between San Francisco and Manila, calling there on the way. The island is 1,300 miles south of Japan, 1,500 miles east from Manila, a little over 3,000 miles from Honolulu and right on the line from the Panama Canal to the Philippines. It is a mountainous island and is the top of an almost submerged volcano in one of the great earthquake lines and volcanic lines of the world. We have had an earthquake there since we took possession. It occurred in 1902, when Commander Schroeder was Governor. In writing about it to the Secretary of the Navy, he says that "the earth opened up here and there, the whole island trembled, buildings rocked and swayed and the bells everywhere were rung by the vibration.

"The walls of the Governor's palace were marred, the barracks where the marines were quartered cracked open and the ice plant was almost thrown down. All the public buildings suffered severely. The hospital became a skeleton, many of the bridges were destroyed and a large number of the masonry houses thrown down." On account of that earthquake the schools had to be stopped, and all public work was for a time suspended. This was only one of many earthquakes that the island has had, and no one knows when another may come.

As to volcanoes proper the island has none. Its highest peak, Mount Jumullong Manglo, is less than 1,300 feet high, and the greater part of the island is a plateau from 200 to 500 feet above the sea. The whole place is so small that the scenery cannot have great variety. The island is only thirty miles long, and on the average about six miles in width. It is shaped like the sole of a shoe, and on the west side of the sole, on the bend of the instep, lies the chief port, known as Agana, on Agana bay. This is the capital of the island, and it is there that our naval Governor lives.

A Look at Agana.

It is often said that Paris is France. In the same sense Agana is Guam. It is the seat of society, politics and trade. It has all the public buildings and about three-fourths of the people. The population is over 7,000, and this in an island of 10,000 is a great many. At Agana are the chief public buildings. The most imposing structures are the Governor's palace, the College of San Juan de Letram, the courts and the barracks.

The town is laid out about a plaza or open place about the size of a city square. The streets are all named, and all the stone houses are numbered. Since we took possession many stone buildings with iron roofs have been constructed. There are also stone houses with roofs of red tiles, but the majority of the people live in houses made of bamboo poles covered with palm leaves and thatched with grasses or plams.

Outside of Agana there are villages, but they are nearly all made of bamboo and thatch. In the whole island only about one house in fifteen has a roof of tile or of iron. The iron is galvanized and the most of it now comes from Japan.

In Agana the public buildings face the plaza, the Governor's palace faces north and the college the officers' quarters and the cathedral the remaining sides. The stores are on the streets. There are five or six in the town, one of which is an American trading concern which has come there for the purpose of acquiring land and dealing in copra. In addition to this there are two Japanese stores, one native store, and one Chinese store. The American and Japanese concerns have small sailing vessels which make regular voyages to bring in cargoes of merchandise and take out copra or dried cocoanut meat.

Since we took possession of Agana we have given it a good water supply. We have put in about a half mile of six-inch sewer pipe for the use of the naval station and the city. In the past the water came from wells six or more feet deep which were practically fed from the surface and were often full of sewage. The government has made a dam of the river that runs through the town and the city water now comes from a reservoir.

Cleanliness Enforced.

Our officials have passed laws that every man must keep his yard and house clean, and inspectors are sent around every week to see that he does so. If he does not they clean it themselves and make him pay the cost. If he does not cut his grass they cut it for him and he pays the bill. As a result of all this Agana is now one of the cleanest towns of the tropics. Guam has had no contagious diseases since it came into our possession, and about the only epidemic disease is dengue fever, a sort of grippe, which at certain seasons seems to run through the island as it does through the United States.

The same sort of cleaning up has been done in the villages, and roads have been built from place to place. These roads are as hard as stone and as smooth as the floor. They might be used for automobiles, but there are none on the island. The material used for surfacing them is a yellow clay called cascajo, which hardens to a cement, and makes a good, permanent highway.

Education in Guam.

When we took hold of Guam there were practically no common schools. There was a little college at Agana, although it was centuries old, but this was hardly equal to the ordinary country high school of the United States. There were also private schools, run by the priests, but, as a rule, the people were illiterate and many could not write their own names. When Governor Leary took hold he sent out an order that every man and woman must learn to write his or her signature within a certain number of months, and that Uncle Sam would furnish the copy. As a result of that nearly every one can now sign his name.

Governor Shroeder brought out some American school teachers, but the revenues grew short, and they had to go back. Since then other schools have been organized, and they are now to be found in Agana and in all the villages. These schools run from the first to the eighth grade. Education is compulsory, and the children are all learning the rudiments of an education. There is a high school in Agana, but it has only about thirty pupils, and there is also the College of San Juan de Latram.

Some school work is being done by the Protestant missionaries, of whom there are some Congregationalists and others. A better missionary work could be done by the American Catholics, for the field is peculiarly theirs. The islanders are devout Catholics, but, like the Filipinos, they have been cursed by the friars and they need the live, progressive methods of modern American Catholicism for their development.

Among the Chamorros.

But who are these people of Guam? Are they Chinese, Japanese, Malayans, or crosses between the Malayan and the savage head hunters? They are far different from the Filipinos, although they have the same semi-Spanish civilization and dress and look much the same. Our Governors have sent to the Navy Department some interesting information concerning them. They come from a race known as the Chamorros, which was in Guam when Magellan landed there in 1521. Magellan says that the natives were warlike, and that they defended themselves with stones and lances. Legaspi, who called at Guam in 1565, says that the people lived in the water half the time, and that the only meat they ate was fish, bats and flying foxes. A Jusuit father, who wrote of the island in the seventeenth century, says that Guam then had 50,000 people, or five times as many as now. The inhabitants lived in towns or villages, having clean houses of bamboo, roofed with cocoanut leaves, and divided into rooms by mats, which were woven in one piece. He says that the men were so corpulent that they seemed swollen, and that they shaved their heads with the exception of a topknot, which was allowed to grow to the height of three inches. The women had long hair, which they bleached dead white, and they stained their teeeth black.

Baseball in the Pacific.

These ancient people were healthy and vigorous and the missionaries say that they baptised 120 men who were each 120 years old. They were great athletes and were expert sprinters, runners and climbers. The people of Guam to-day are resuming their interest in athletics. Our marines have introduced them to the delights of baseball, and there are now ball clubs everywhere. Every school has its club, and there are naval clubs and civil clubs. The little Guamites are excellent ball players and the native teams have beaten those of the officers again and again. There are now tennis courts at Agana and the desire for gymnastics is growing.

Our Cousins of Guam.

But let us look at the Guamites of to-day. There is a good slice of the old Chamorro in them. They have also been mixed with the islands about and with the Spaniards. The Governor's reports say that the Spanish officers who have ruled the country in the past have intermarried with the native women, and that to-day the names of the upper crust include the family names of nearly every Governor for the last one hundred years. Guam has its four hundred; and it is harder for one born outside that class to gain admittance to the houses of the Torreses, Martinezes, Calvos or Diazes than for a gutter snipe to enter the most sulect circles of America.

This upper crust has its own receptions and balls. Its laws of etiquette are strict and the women are almost secluded. Until recently the well-to-do natives sent their children to Manila or Madrid to be educated. The girls are said to be good dancers, and most of them are able to play a little on the piano.

It is this better class that owns most of the plantations of the island. The men do not work, but rent out their ranches or employ laborers. It is from them that the subordinate officials of Guam are taken. The youn gladies form a part of the official society. They attend balls given at the Governor's palace, and are said to be pretty and vivacious. Their dress consists of a full skirt of fine muslin or silk and a zouave jacket of delicately white embroidered material with flowing sleeves. The people of the better class do not use the betel nut, nor do the women smoke. Since the American occupation many have adopted our style of dress.

The Common People.

The common people are very much like the masses of the Filipinos. They go barefoot and wear their skirts outside their trousers. While at work the shirt is often taken off and the trousers rolled to the hips. On Sunday a pair of half slippers may be added as a part of the dress.

The richer people of Agana have very comfortable homes, but the poor throughout the island live in huts of bamboo and thatch. These are built five or six feet from the ground, and usually have but one room, ventilated by three or four openings for windows. There is no glass, but each window has a sliding wooden shutter.

Such houses have but little furniture. The common bed is a mat of woven grass and the whole family sleeps on the floor of the one room. The doors and windows are tightly closed, for the people think that the night air brings fever. They sleep in the same clothes that they wear during the daytime. Every such house has a thatched leanto at one end, in which the cooking is done. The ordinary stove is a stone inclosure, filled with earth, upon which a fire is built, a number of smaller stones keep the pots off the coals.

The Women of Guam.

The women of the poorer classes, on feast days and Sunday wear long, trailing skirts of bright-colored calico and a white muslin jacket over a short chemise. They have cheap handkerchiefs covering their heads. On working days they wear a similar dress, but tuck the skirt into the belt. They labor in the fields with their skirts fastened high up above the knees, and thus clad they climb cocoanut trees by notches cut in the trunk. A girl will go up hand over hand to a height of forty feet, her skirts being gathered about her waist and a short black pipe held between her teeth. She will stand in the water up to her waist and pound the clothes she is washing against a wooden tray which floats on the surface of the river. These women can walk great distances. They are well formed and have beautiful black hair, of which they are proud. So says one of our naval governors.

When we took possession of Guam we found the people exceedingly lazy. Wages under the Spanish had been almost nothing and there was no incentive to work. Beggars were many and vagrants were common. One of the first edicts of Governor Leary was that every inhabitant should be self-supporting. If he had no trade or occupation he must at once plant some corn, rice, coffee, sweet potatoes or other things sufficient to give him a living, and that he must have at least twelve hens, one cock and one sow. The Governor gave lands to some such men, but the big wages offered by the officials have brought the natives generally into the employ of the government.

The Future of Guam.

And this brings me to a serious condition which will likely confront Guam in the near future. The public works which Uncle Sam has been carrying on during the past nine years have brought a great deal of money into the island. During that time the imports have exceeded the exports by more than a half million dollars and the greater part of this money has come from the wages paid to the natives for the labor on the public works.

As a result, the people have had more cash than ever before, and the prices of living have risen one or two thousand per cent. The wants of the people have also increased. Formerly they lived for the most part on the taro, yams and bananas which they raised themselves. They have now become accustomed to the tinned meats and vegetables brought in from Japan and America.

All this has been paid for with labor. But now the most of the public work has been done. The island is well equipped with roads. Its harbors have been improved and the public buildings have been erected. The big jobs must soon stop, and the people must then go back to the land, where they cannot make anything like what they have done while laboring for Uncle Sam. How this may be brought about without trouble remains to be seen.

Some Money-Making Possibilities.

The government will have to encourage agriculture and arrange for the exports. One of the possibilities will be in cocoanut raising. This has not been pushed, on account of the labor market, but I am told the island could be turned into a great cocoanut plantation. The experts say it might annually yield 200,000 tons of copra, which could be sold at a profit of $10 a ton. That alone would bring in $2,000,000 per annum.

The higher lands of the island are suitable for coffee and the lower portions will grow sugar. There are also 100 square miles of forest, the timber of which at present prices is worth about $2,000,000.

Another possible crop is vanilla, another cacao and a third rubber, for it is said that the india rubber tree can be grown there. The rice fields may be also increased. They are rudely farmed, and with Japanese methods of culture might produce ten times as much as they now do. All of these various crops will be experimented with and the island will eventually be a great tropical garden.

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